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THE HIGH SCHOOL CHORUS

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(Continued from January issue)

Variety

New music should be taken up in several ways. Some of the new selections should be sung with the piano the first time as a choral society would sing them, the leader assuming that every pupil reads music well. Pupils should learn that mistakes are of no consequence, and, furthermore, should never be reproved for them. They should sing the piece through without stopping at the first attempt, no matter how many mistakes they make, in the proper time. This will give the pupils a correct idea of the piece as a whole the first time they go through it. The mistakes can be corrected later. Too much reading of new music in this way will, however, make the pupils careless and cause them to relapse into being mere guessers, no matter how good their preparation has been. To obviate this, some of the new music should be sung by syllable without the piano and without the beating of time by the leader. In taking up a new piece by syllable, the pupils should hold their books and beat time. If the music room is provided with desks or chairs with desk arms, the books may be laid flat. If the room is provided with opera chairs, the pupils may lean forward and lay the books flat on the top of the back of the chair in front, holding the book steady with the right. The leader may then walk around and help the weak ones. He will be able to spot these unerringly in the largest class by the way the fingers are pointing. This pointing of the finger shows just what and how much or little the pupil knows. In this work also the pupils must hold to the logical sequence of reading music and keep going, singing smoothly and in time, no matter how many mistakes they make or how badly the music sounds.

Motive

In all this work the leader should see that the motive force comes from the pupils. He should teach them early in the game that they are to work whenever there is an opportunity instead of whenever they are told. He should convince them that they should come to school to get all they can and not all they have to. We should make them feel that they are to keep the lesson moving, that the teacher is merely the steersmen and advisor. This treatment will throw the responsibility upon the pupils where it belongs. When the moving force comes from the pupils habitually, the teacher may stop the class and drill as he sees fit, but on no account are the pupils to get the idea that they may stop for mistakes or anything else unless the leader stops them. Following this rule will save much time, and pupils will develop such alert and fearless habits of mind that they will read music rapidly, accurately, and eagerly.

Practice

It is a good plan to sing a new selection only once or twice at the first lesson and then lay it away to be finished and polished at another lesson. The class should be watched closely, and when they show signs of fatigue or lack of interest, another selection should be given them to sing. It is far better to practice a piece at several different lessons than to spend too much time on the same piece at one lesson.

Material

The question of material for the chorus is a vital one. If there is material enough of the right kind, the chorus will be a success, when there is a good leader. If there is not material enough, no matter how fine the leading and other conditions, the chorus will amount to little. It is an expensive thing to furnish enough music to keep up the interest in the high school chorus work, and it is only possible where the Board of Education buys the material. Where the pupils buy the music books, it is out of the question to ask them to purchase enough. Good material and plenty of it of many kinds should be the motto of every music super-

visor. Mrs. Means might have been addressing supervisors of music when she gave her celebrated bit of advice, "Git while yer gittin; git it and git a plenty."

It is a mistake to select too easy music for the high school pupil. He is very much grown up when he enters high school, at least he thinks he is, and it is just as well to recognize and take advantage of this notion of his. By giving him grownup music, leaders will cause him to work all the harder. In music as well as anything else a pupil gets out of it in knowledge and enjoyment just about as much as he puts into it in the way of effort, and anything that will make him want to put forth more effort is so much gained. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that music has many sides, and that amusement is one of the important ones. Since pupils should be trained for amusement as well as work, many selections of a lighter kind should be used. "A bit of nonsense now and then is relished, etc."; and a bit of well-sung rag time has started many a lazy class on the upward musical climb.

In cities where there are several high schools it is a good plan to get different music for each high school. When one school has finished a book or selection, it should trade with another school. Thus the library is made several times larger at no added expense. Of course the material will wear out somewhat faster under this plan, but pupils should be taught to care for public property even more carefully than they do for their own.

The pupils should be taught to turn the leaves quickly and noiselessly. This will keep the class quiet, the music will sound better, and the books will last far longer. Furthermore, the pupils will also learn to take care of public property in case the books belong to the school. The best way is to grasp the edge of the page or one of the corners with the thumb and finger.

Variety of Material

The material should be selected with a view to giving the pupil a well-rounded education in all kinds of choral music during the high school course. There is little that cannot be sung by high school pupils if the voices are tested properly and watched carefully.

Every pupil should surely know one or more of the great oratorios like the "Messiah," "Elijah," or the "Creation," which stand at the head of the choral forms of music. He should both study and hear these given in their entirety. Next should come the great cantatas like "Hiawatha," and lighter ones like "Swan and Skylark," "Rose Maiden," and "Joan of Arc." There is a wealth of these latter to choose from. They have beautiful music and fascinating stories. There are operas both light and grand which can be studied by the whole school and given in concert form by the whole class, or given with costume and action by a smaller number. These operas well repay study, but we are limited to a comparatively small number as there are few opera stories which will bear very close inspection, and the supervisor will wisely limit himself to proper stories in selecting operas for student presentation. Some of the greatest choral music known is in the form of masses. Pupils should know something of this form of sacred choral music, but unfortunately the use of these masses in public schools is liable to promote ill-feeling. For a similar reason the use of the Messiah is not tactful in a school containing Jewish children.

Many people question the advisability of using these great choral pieces, saying that the pupils will strain their voices. Years ago it was said that singing Wagner ruined the voices of the singers, but such was not the case. Singing never harmed any voice. Yelling does. When Lilli Lehmann, Lillian Nordica, and Jean de Reszke came along the world found out that singing Wagner was perfectly safe for the voice. It is not the music that is dangerous, but the way the voice is used that does the damage. If pupils use their voices easily and correctly, they will be just as safe singing an oratorio as a lullaby.

There are a number of oratorios, operas, and cantatas published with the chorus parts only. This makes the music cheap but these chorus copies are of

doubtful value. One of the principal reasons why these compositions in their entirety are so useful and interesting is that they tell a more or less connected story both in the words and in the music. The music of the accompaniment and the words and music of the solos, duets, etc., are very important parts of the piece, and the pupils in the chorus never have a chance to learn these if they use only the chorus parts. The solos and the corrected pieces for the soloists should be sung occasionally by the chorus so that every one will get an idea of the whole piece. When the concert is given, the pupils will derive an exquisite pleasure from hearing and following the score of the music they already know, as it is sung by fine soloists and played by the orchestra instead of on the piano. It is not a wise thing to purchase these chorus editions unless forced to by circumstances. The added interest and education the chorus receives well repays the added expense of the regular vocal scores. Also when purchasing these books the buyer should be sure that they are bound very strongly, as there is a great deal of wear and tear on music books. Moreover, a book once purchased should be a permanent addition to the library to be used when desired.

Probably the most difficult position in the whole school system to fill successfully is that of high school chorus leader. The classes are large; they meet the teacher but once or twice weekly, and the pupils are just at the age when they are hardest to handle. These and many other reasons make the path of the chorus leader anything but a flowery one.

The teacher must be a disciplinarian, one who is able to rule tactfully without too much show of driving. He must be a teacher of the most ingenious variety and also have great force and endurance, both mental and physical. He must have perfect self-control, for nowhere is it needed so much as in the high school chorus class. He must have the right attitude toward his subject and see it from the big human educational side, as well as from the musical side. He must have infinite patience, firmness, and an immense love for young people.

It is no easy work to be a successful chorus leader. It is a man's job, though many women are doing it splendidly. When I say that it is a man's job, I mean that boys are more likely to sing if there is a man at the helm. Then again in the large high schools, where there are many classes daily, the mere physical strain of several chorus classes in succession is too much for the average woman not possessed of great physical as well as mental endurance. Pages might be filled with the attributes desirable in a chorus leader but we must not go so far as to discourage the aspirants to success in this field.

Book Review Section

A SIGNIFICANT VOLUME

The MacMillan Co., to whom all music lovers are indebted for their valuable Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, have placed Americans in their special debt by issuing a supplementary or sixth edition as an American supplement. This book of 412 pages, uniform in size and binding with the other five, is edited by Waldo Selden Pratt, the veteran critic and lecturer of Hartford, Connecticut, and Charles N. Boyd of the Pittsburgh Musical Institute. These two earnest students, capable writers, and thoroughly informed musicians have produced a volume which by its breadth of view, soundness of judgment, accuracy of statement, and good taste throughout will be a matter of gratification to musicians of this country and a source of much enlightenment to the musicians of other countries.

The volume consists of two large divisions. The second division is an enlarged, humanized, and readable series of personal and descriptive articles on musicians, institutions, and musical movements in America. Upwards of 1700 persons are included for at least brief reference and 700 or more are the subject of illuminating, descriptive articles. Prominent schools of music, orchestras, opera houses, music departments of colleges and universities, associations such as the Supervisors' Conference, the M. T. N. A., movements in education, such as music in the church, in the public schools—these and a great variety of other topics tersely but adequately treated make this section of the volume that mine of information for the astonishing array of musicians and musical institutions in America which the pre-